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Burt challenged on work as reporter

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WASHINGTON

Richard Burt, nominated to be assistant secretary of state for Europe, was questioned closely Wednesday by a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who was concerned Burt had revealed U.S. secrets.

Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., said his questions were not meant to hold up Burt's nomination, but said he wanted to express concern about an article Burt wrote while working for The New York Times in 1979.

It discussed a new U.S. method of detecting Soviet missile tests through Norway to replace the monitoring stations the United States lost in Iran.

Helms, who said Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., shared his concern, said the story upset the Norwegians and then questioned how that would affect Burt's new role as the top U.S. official for European policy.

Democrats Joseph Biden of Delaware and Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island defended Burt. Pell is the committee's ranking Democrat.

Biden said the Senate might as well make a law prohibiting any journalist from holding a government position. "I hope we don't create a dangerous precedent," said Biden when commenting on Helms' request.

Pell said that if anyone was to blame in case of leaks of classified information, it is the officials who do the leaking and not the journalists who receive the information.

Helms asked committee chairman Charles Percy, R-Ill., to ask the Senate Intelligence Committee, headed by Goldwater, to prepare what he called a "damage assessment" report on Burt's newspaper story.

Burt said he alone made the decision to write the story and that he had not been discouraged by official sources from writing it.

He said he met with CIA Director Stansfield Turner after his story was published because of the concern it caused within the U.S. intelligence community. He gave further details on that meeting.

Burt would not specifically say whether he got the information from administration officials. He said he preferred to refer to them as "individuals," but acknowledged it was someone with an "official capacity."

arrested in the assassination attempt on May 13, 1981, in St. Peter's Square in Rome.

Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., said during the hearing that he would seek an investigation of whether U.S. intelligence gathering capability was damaged by publication of a news story Burt wrote when he was a reporter for The New York Times.

The story, published on June 29, 1979, said the Carter administration was preparing an alternative plan for verifying the then-pending SALT II nuclear arms limitation treaty in the event that Turkey did not allow U-2 reconnaissance planes over its territory.

Helms
~~Burt~~ said he was asking Sen. Charles H. Percy, R-Ill., to request an investigation by the Senate Intelligence Committee. He said Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., chairman of that committee, shared his concern over the possible effects of the story's publication.

Helms also said he would not seek to hold up the Burt nomination, which will be acted upon by the committee at a later meeting.

Burt, who was a correspondent in the Times' Washington bureau from 1977 to 1980, said he believed at the time that the story contained classified information, but he did not think its disclosure would be harmful.

He said that when he was told that publication of the story had "created concern in the intelligence community," he became "somewhat alarmed" and obtained a meeting with Stansfield Turner, then CIA director, to talk about it.

He did not discuss the contents of their conversation.